



KYLE L. JANEK, M.D.
EXECUTIVE COMMISSIONER

Date: December 9, 2014

Texas Works Bulletin: #15-04

To: Eligibility Services – Regional Directors
Program Managers
Eligibility Services Supervisors
Regional Attorneys
Hearings Officers

From: Stephanie Stephens, Director
Policy Strategy, Analysis, and Development
State Office 2115

Subject: 2015 Federal Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA): Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (RSDI); Supplemental Security Income (SSI); Railroad Retirement (RR) Benefits; Medicare Part B Premiums

Bulletins are sent to supervisors and other regional managers, who must share the information with eligibility staff. Please ensure that copies are provided to staff without access to email. For questions regarding the information in this memo, follow regional procedures. Find active bulletins at the following respective handbook websites:

- Medicaid for the Elderly and People with Disabilities (MEPD):
http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/mepd_policy/index.htm
- Texas Works:
http://www.dads.state.tx.us/handbooks/texasworks_bulletins/index.htm

2015 COLA: RSDI, SSI, RR Benefits, Medicare Part B Premiums

Background

The Social Security Administration (SSA) adjusts the RSDI and SSI benefits to reflect changes in the cost of living effective January 1 of each year. For 2015, the cost-of-living increase is 1.7 percent for RSDI, SSI, and RR benefits. The Medicare Part B premium amount will remain \$104.90 per month for 2015.

Texas Works and MEPD automation changes to support these increases were deployed the weekend of December 6, 2014.

New 2015 Maximum SSI Standard Payments

The new 2015 maximum SSI standard payment amounts are:

- \$733 for an individual
- \$1,100 for a couple

The new 2015 combined RSDI/SSI maximum standard payment amounts are:

- \$753 for an individual
- \$1,120 for a couple

New 2015 Medicare Part B Premium

Some HHSC Texas Works clients who receive Medicare Part B have their monthly Medicare Part B premiums withheld from their RSDI/RR benefits. The Medicare Premium Part B will remain \$104.90 for 2015.

Impacted Cases

On the weekend of December 6, 2014, the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) will update the income and expenses for all individuals who have this type of income or expense in TIERS, including those not currently active, on the following Eligibility Determination Groups (EDGs):

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and TANF-State Program (SP) (TP 01 and TP 61)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Texas Works Medical Programs

When TIERS is unable to update this information, an exception report is generated for the advisor to take action on an individual or case.

Advisor Actions

- When disposing any EDG before the COLA update, staff must use 2014 amounts in the budget months of December 2014 and January 2015. The COLA update will enter the new 2015 amounts for January 2015 and for ongoing months.
- When disposing an ongoing EDG after the COLA update, staff must ensure that the new 2015 amounts are entered in the Data Collection records and are counted in the budgets.
- After the COLA update, when disposing an application for an individual that was not in TIERS prior to the COLA update, staff must use the 2014 amount for the budget month of December 2014 and use the new amount for January 2015 and ongoing months if a budget is required.

How New RSDI/SSI Grant Amounts are Determined

When possible, state office matches case information from TIERS records with information from the Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX) and State Data Exchange (SDX) interfaces to

determine the correct new amount of RSDI and SSI. If these interface matches indicate a different amount of RSDI or SSI than TIERS, the case will be updated based on the BENDEX/SDX interface information. Cases not listed on BENDEX or SDX interface matches will be updated by increasing the RSDI or SSI amount shown in TIERS by 1.7 percent effective January 2015.

Appeal Procedures

Clients may appeal any adverse action resulting from the COLA update. Continue benefits at the previous levels only if all of the following conditions are met:

- The appeal is based on the advisor incorrectly computing eligibility/benefits or misapplying federal policy;
- The client appeals within 13 days from receiving the adverse action notice; and
- The client does not waive the right to continued benefits.

Remind TANF and SNAP clients that an overpayment, subject to recoupment, will occur if:

- The benefits are continued at the previous level, and
- The hearing officer's decision is not in the client's favor.

Exception: Clients adversely affected by the 2015 COLA update may request an appeal and be entitled to continued benefits, if not waived, when the date of request extends beyond the 13-day adverse action period due to mail time. The action date of client notices is December 7, 2014, but the mail dates will be staggered over several weeks. Staff must allow continued benefits, if not waived by the client, due to the staggered mail dates of client notices.

Update of TIERS Data and Cases

Mass Update

TIERS will update RSDI, SSI, and RR income amounts and the Medicare Part B premium information for all TIERS individuals, including denied individuals. The income and expense pages will reflect the effective begin date of the new data. TIERS will generate exception reports for advisor action on individuals/cases whose data cannot be updated.

TIERS will use the following verification sources for COLA, which Eligibility Determination/Benefit Calculation (EDBC) considers valid verification sources:

- "Percentage Increase Used" when TIERS calculated the new RSDI, SSI, or RR amount using the percentage calculation.
- "SMIB" when Medicare Part B premium amounts were updated based on the interface file.
- "COLA Update" when the Medicare Part B premium amount is updated to \$104.90 and the client is not on the Supplemental Medical Insurance Benefits (SMIB) or BENDEX file.
- "SDX" when TIERS updates the new RSDI, SSI, or RR amount from the SDX interface file.
- "BENDEX" when RSDI income amounts were updated from the annual BENDEX file.

TIERS Mass Update will run eligibility, dispose the EDGs in the case, and send case-specific client correspondence on active cases/EDGs in Ongoing case mode. TIERS will update data but not run eligibility in the following situations:

- A case is not in Ongoing mode,
- A case contains any EDG with ongoing benefits that are overridden, and
- An EDG is denied.

A Mass Update Exception Report will be generated for cases when the COLA update could not be completed because the case was not in Ongoing mode or the case has an EDG with overridden benefits.

Correspondence

Due to the high volume of client notices, the Austin Data Center (ADC) will stagger the mail-out over three weeks. The date on the TF0001, Notice of Case Action, will be December 7, 2014. The COLA TF0001, Notice of Case Action, will contain the following message:

English: *"The amount of state benefits you get must change. This is due to a change in either: (1) the amount of money you get in federal benefits (RSDI, SSI, or Railroad Retirement), or (2) the amount you pay for Medicare Part B."*

Spanish: *"La cantidad de beneficios del estado que usted recibe tiene que cambiar. Esto es por un cambio en: (1) la cantidad de dinero que usted recibe en beneficios federales (RSDI, SSI, o beneficios de jubilación ferroviaria), o (2) la cantidad que usted paga por Medicare Parte B."*

This message will appear in correspondence triggered due to either Mass Update or the first time the advisor disposes the EDG after the COLA update.

Reports

TIERS will generate interface exception reports (for the reasons in the list which follows) on cases that cannot be processed in the interface update. The interface exception reports will contain specific instructions on the actions required by the Texas Works advisor and MEPD specialist. Automation staff will forward the interface exception reports to Eligibility Operations. Field staff must take appropriate action to verify and correct client information, income, and premium amounts for all individuals or cases that appear on the exception reports according to policy for each type of assistance program.

Interface exception reports are generated for the following reasons:

- TIERS and/or the interface file have multiple Social Security Claim Numbers (SSCNs); however, all the SSCNs do not match. The RSDI income records were not updated. Verify the RSDI amount for all SSCNs for the client and correct income amounts and SSCNs.
- The RSDI income records were not updated because the client is receiving RSDI on four or more SSCNs. Verify the RSDI amount for all SSCNs for the client and correct income amounts and SSCNs.
- The Medicare Part B premium does not equal the amount of \$104.90. Mass Update was not performed on this case. Review the case and update the premium.

- According to interface data, the Medicare Part B premium is paid by the state of Texas; however, TIERS does not reflect this information. Review the case, update data collection, and run eligibility.
- According to TIERS data, the Medicare Part B premium is paid by the State of Texas; however, the SMIB file does not reflect this information. Review the case, update data collection, and run eligibility.
- TIERS has multiple RSDI income records for an individual with different SSCNs who also receives SSI. The records were not updated because the combined amount (RSDI and SSI) could not be determined. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the client.
- TIERS indicates the client is receiving RSDI and SSI; however, based on BENDEX the client's combined RSDI and SSI is over the individual combined amount. The RSDI income amount was updated with the amount from BENDEX, and the SSI amount was updated to the difference between the combined amount and the RSDI amount. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the client.
- TIERS indicates the client is receiving RSDI and SSI; however, the client's combined RSDI and SSI is over the individual combined amount. Only the SSI income amount was updated using the percentage increase. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the client and take appropriate action.